

## **Turkel-Benbow House**

2760 Seven Mile

Local  
State                   √       11/2/80  
State Marker  
National



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### **Historic overview:**

In 1956, Mrs. Dorothy S. Turkel commissioned internationally acclaimed architect Frank Lloyd Wright to design a residence for her property in the Palmer Woods Subdivision. She selected a “Usonian Automatic”, a two-story concrete block residence. The estimated construction cost was \$65,000, no small sum for a residence in 1956.

Wright first designed what he called Usonian houses in 1936 in Wisconsin. The origin of this term is unclear, but seems to relate to the reformed American way of life that Wright worked for and hoped for in the last part of his life. One theory is that the word derives from U.S.A. or U.S.O.N.A., an acronym for the United States of North America, which had at one time been proposed to avoid confusion should the Union of South Africa also be referred to as the U.S.A. Usonian houses had a high degree of prefabrication of materials off-site in order to keep on-site labor down. They also introduced new techniques, such as eliminating the basement, but heating the house through a series of pipes in the foundation.

In the 1950s, Wright combined features of the Usonian house with some of the techniques developed in the block houses of the 1920s to create the “Usonian Automatic”. Wright intended this style to be used for people to build their own houses at low cost, and thought GIs would embrace it. However, contractors generally built Usonian Automatics, due to the fact that Wright was perceived as avant-garde, and the system required a high degree of precision.

